

Arguments For Capital Punishment



Some Christians believe the death penalty is acceptable. They believe that because:

- Jesus never taught the death penalty was wrong
- The Old Testament teaches that the death penalty should be used for some crimes:

"He who sheds a person's blood, shall have the blood shed, for in the image of God humans were made."

Genesis 9:6

"Life for life, eye for an eye." Exodus 21:24

- Some Christians would argue that the death penalty upholds the commandment "thou shalt not kill" by showing the seriousness of murder as a crime
- St Paul teaches that Christians should accept and obey the laws of their country, which might include the death penalty.
- The Catholic Church has not cancelled its statement that capital punishment can be used by the state
- Religious and non-religious people might argue that some crimes are so dreadful that the most extreme form of punishment is justified. They might also argue that it is wrong to spend money on keeping someone in prison long term, when that money is needed by others in society

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CP



Capital punishment, or the death penalty, is punishment that takes the life of the criminal. Some people think it is a good form of punishment because it deters people from murdering others and takes a life for a life. Other people disagree with capital punishment because evidence shows it does not deter, and innocent people can be killed for crimes they did not commit.

Arguments Against Capital Punishment



Many Christians believe that capital punishment is un-Christian. They believe this because:

- Jesus came to save (reform) sinners, but you cannot reform a dead person
- The commandment says, **'Do not kill'**
- Jesus said that revenge is wrong: **'You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.'** – **Matthew 5:38**
- Christianity teaches that all life is sacred and that humans are made in God's image. If abortion and euthanasia are wrong, then so is capital punishment. Only God has the right to give and take away life
- The overall message of Christianity is love and forgiveness, so capital punishment goes against this
- Religious and non-religious people might say that there is always a risk that the wrong person might be executed and 'two wrongs don't make a right'
- Christians would agree with humanists that we should value the lives of all, human rights are important, and that governments should defend all their people. Therefore, killing as a punishment is wrong.

Knowledge Check



1. What is Capital Punishment?
2. What biblical quote might Christians cite in support of Capital Punishment (CP)?
3. What arguments do Christians give in support of CP? (Give three examples)
4. What biblical quote might Christians cite against CP?
5. What arguments do Christians give against CP? (Give three examples)
6. What is Pope Francis' view on CP?
7. What did St Pope John Paul II say about CP in Evangelium Vitae 56? (summarise)
8. What was St Augustine's view on CP? (summarise)

Choose a Task



1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

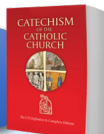
Exam Question



c) Explain different Christian attitudes to Capital Punishment (8 Marks)

Catholic Teaching on Capital Punishment

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)



The Catholic position on capital punishment has developed over many years. Traditionally the Catholic Church has allowed, **but not encouraged** capital punishment.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: **'Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty.'** CCC 2267

Pope Francis: completely against CP!



In recent years Pope Francis has stated that he is against the death penalty, saying that it is no longer justifiable and there is also the possibility that the wrong person could be killed.

St Pope John Paul II: Evangelium Vitae 56



Pope St John Paul II in his Evangelium Vitae 56, suggested that capital punishment should be avoided unless it is the only way to defend society from the offender. This is the position set on in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church:

'If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.'

St Augustine's Letters



In two famous letters, St Augustine emphasises the need to seek other punishments if at all possible.

'... we pity the person, but hate the offence or transgression. In fact, the more we dislike the vice in question, the less do we want the offender to die without correcting his vices... There is no space to reform character except in this life. After that, each person will have whatever he has won for himself here [in this life]. That is why we are forced to intercede for the guilty, out of love for the human race. For otherwise [capital] punishment will end this life for them, and once it is ended, they will not be able to bring their punishment to an end.'

– Letter 153 to Macedoius, 3

'...we would prefer to have them set free than to have the sufferings of our brothers avenged by shedding their blood.'

– Letter 134 to Apringius, 4

